United Nations A/C.3/73/SR.11

General Assembly
Seventy-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
24 October 2018

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 11th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 9 October 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Saikal (Chair) ..... (Afghanistan)

Contents

Agenda item 70: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 70: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/73/41, A/73/174, A/72/174/Corr.1, A/73/257, A/73/265, A/73/272, A/73/276 and A/73/278)

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (A/73/223)

1. **Ms. Gamba** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), introducing her report (A/73/278), said that in the past three decades since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child significant progress had been made in the protection of children, including children affected by armed conflict. Over the previous year, child protection actors had supported the reintegration of over 10,000 children, new entry points had been found to engage with parties to conflict and engagement with regional actors had been strengthened.

2. However, there was still a long road ahead to ensure that the provisions contained in the Convention yielded the results its authors intended. Children continued to be recruited or abducted across borders and used to fight or serve in other roles outside of their countries of origin, and those boys and girls were often subsequently exposed to violence, separated from their families or caregivers and stripped of their support networks. Such violations further increased the complexity of prevention and response efforts. It was important to emphasize that the detention of children for their alleged or actual association with armed forces or groups was not a viable response, and yet, rather than being given opportunities for reintegration, children continued to be detained, exposed to harsh detention conditions and faced severe sentences.

3. Internationally coordinated responses based on international law were needed to find durable solutions for children affected by war; responses that put children at risk of statelessness contravened th central tenants of international law and only served to perpetuate the status quo. Initiatives that raised awareness of the issue of children and armed conflict and catalysed response efforts, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, provided Member States with guidance on how to treat children affected by armed conflict and deserved full support.

4. Her Office had launched a number of child protection and conflict prevention initiatives. One priority was to establish prevention plans with Governments and regional and subregional organizations on all listable grave violations to prevent children from being the first victims of violence and to address violations taking place across borders. Over the reporting period, she had reached out to the Central African Republic, Colombia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Myanmar, which had expressed interest in developing national plans for prevention. She had also worked with regional organizations for the protection of children in armed conflict, including by contributing to the development of the human rights compliance framework of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and by engaging with the child protection advisor of the African Union.

5. With a view to identifying and making the best use of entry points to strengthen child protection, her Office had worked with the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on a consultative process to compile lessons learned and good practices and to develop practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes. Her Office had also established a unit to further increase public awareness about children and armed conflict and had organized an event in September 2018 on the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

6. Given the need to strengthen the legal foundations governing children and armed conflict, she was particularly pleased that South Sudan had recently become the 168th Member State to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

7. Reintegration was a prevention tool that enabled children to regain ownership over their childhood and minimized the risk of their re-recruitment. To deepen understanding of that issue, she had recently announced the creation of a coalition that would bring together relevant actors to enable sustainable, comprehensive and long-term reintegration, for which she called on Member States to provide their active support. Member States should also join the 81 endorsing States of the Safe Schools Declaration, which had made an important contribution towards protecting education in conflict settings. Education was an indispensable aspect of children's socialization and thus of any reintegration effort.

8. Her Office would soon be launching a new global advocacy campaign to end and prevent the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. The campaign would work with child protection actors on

the ground, Member States, regional organizations and civil society to accelerate global mobilization towards ending violations. Similar initiatives included Alliance 8.7, launched by the International Labour Organization in 2015 to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour.

9. Lastly, her Office and its partners must be provided with sufficient resources to enable them to focus on mandated tasks. The international community must become better at preventing violations before they took place and ensure that children were at the centre of peace processes.

10. **Ms. Tasuja** (Estonia) expressed her delegation's support for the efforts made by the Special Representative to protect the human rights of children. Her commitment to engaging with parties to conflict had clearly led to the implementation of practical action plans, awareness-raising and other positive outcomes. She asked the Special Representative about the practical follow-up of implementation of agreements and the reasons behind any obstructions that she might have encountered.

11. **Ms. Al-Temimi** (Qatar) said that the data from the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict had indicated an increase in the number of verified cases in each of the six grave violations in 2017 compared with 2016, which required the international community to take the necessary measures to put an end to such violations. As a strong advocate for the protection and promotion of children's rights, Qatar had recently signed an agreement with the Office of the Special Representative to open a centre for children and armed conflict in Doha.

12. **Mr. Gutiérrez Segú Berdullas** (Spain) said that his country had undertaken specific actions focusing on prevention, mitigation and the reinsertion of children in armed conflict. For example, Spain had endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers; it had joined the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict; and it had launched a project on education in emergency situations under the Spanish Cooperation Master Plan for 2018–2021. He asked the Special Representative to elaborate on the coalition for reintegration and on the transition to a new mechanism to achieve long-term, comprehensive and sustainable reintegration programmes.

13. In 2019 his country would be hosting the third Conference on Safe Schools, in which the Special Representative had been invited to take part. The objectives for the Conference included increasing the number of subscribers to the Safe Schools Declaration, promoting the exchange of experiences and best practices, and increasing the visibility of the Declaration and its Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Another objective was to provide access to education for the empowerment of girls and women and to ensure their meaningful participation in peace processes, peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

14. **Ms. Dravec** (Slovenia) said that the report of the Special Representative had highlighted the cross-border nature of violations against children and the urgent need to develop common standards and procedures to prevent the use of children in armed conflicts. In that context, she asked whether relevant measures had been undertaken.

15. **Mr. O'Brien** (Observer for the European Union) said that, despite the achievements of the Office of the Special Representative in terms of the release and reintegration of children, the United Nations reporting and monitoring mechanisms had shown an increase in the six grave violations against children in 2017. The Special Representative should nevertheless be commended for her successful engagement with parties to conflict, which had led to the signing of two new action plans, the revitalization of existing plans, the delisting of five parties from the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict and the adoption of protocols for the release of children in the Niger and the Sudan. Member States that had not yet done so should ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and endorse the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups.

16. Welcoming the adoption of Security Council resolution 2427 (2018) on children and armed conflict, he enquired about the most important next steps in the implementation of that resolution. Furthermore, considering the positive impact of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, he requested more information on the new campaign to revitalize the commitment of the international community to better protect children in situations of armed conflict. Lastly, also welcoming the visits of the Special Representative to Colombia, Myanmar and the Sudan, he asked whether any other country visits were foreseen in the coming months.

17. **Ms. Fréchin** (Switzerland) said that the monitoring and reporting mechanism had made it possible to verify violations against children in situations of armed conflict and to establish action plans with parties to conflict with a view to bringing the

conflict to an end. Dialogue with armed groups must remain open and the listing of parties to conflict must be complete and credible.

18. Last year more than 10,000 children had been demobilized, a process that must be followed by reintegration. In that regard Switzerland, in conjunction with the Special Representative and UNICEF, would hold an event during Geneva Peace Week in November 2018 to assess the extent to which reintegration programmes were successful in building sustainable peace. She would welcome more details about the new campaign to be implemented by the Special Representative to further strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict and wished to know how Switzerland could support it.

19. **Mr. Roberts** (United Kingdom) said that his country considered the agreement and implementation of action plans to be a vital step for improving the protection of children. In 2018, his Government had endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and the guidance set out in the Vancouver Principles, and had called on all other States to endorse and implement those instruments. In November 2019, the United Kingdom planned to host an international meeting on the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, in which one of the key focuses would be how to better support children born of sexual violence in conflict, including tackling stigma. He asked the Special Representative how, alongside the plan to address the six grave violations, she intended to address matters that were not grave violations but nonetheless seriously affected children around the world; how to embed children's views into peace processes; and how to build on issues such as tackling stigma against children born of sexual violence.

20. **Ms. Ameni** (Canada) said that her country was particularly concerned by the cross-border nature and increasing number of violations against children. In the light of the relevant conclusions set out in the report of the Special Representative, as well as the increase in cases of human trafficking and sexual abuse of children in conflict situations, she asked how such concerns could be addressed by the international community.

21. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that generations of Palestinian children had been violently deprived of a normal childhood, their fundamental human rights had been violated and their right to safety and security had been non-existent under Israeli occupation. Since March 2018, nearly 30 Palestinian children had been killed and 3,700 had been injured while peacefully protesting the occupation, and Palestinian children continued to suffer from home demolitions and displacement, arrest and detention, harassment and violence. To more effectively address the precarious situation facing Palestinian children, the Special Representative should publicly advocate for their protection and well-being, firmly support their rights, including their right to life, follow up on recommendations to the occupying Power in previous reports, and deliver regular briefings to the Security Council on the situation of Palestinian children. The State of Palestine was willing to intensify its work with the Office of the Special Representative and invited her to undertake a visit to the country, including East Jerusalem, where she could witness first-hand the tragic reality of Palestinian children and provide recommendations on ways to better protect them under occupation.

22. **Mr. Rohland** (Germany) said that his country welcomed the efforts made by the Special Representative to strengthen the focus on prevention and cooperation matters with local civil society, including through her recent field visits and engagement with regional actors His delegation was grateful for the participation of the Special Representative in the annual workshop on children and armed conflict recently held in Berlin and hoped that she would take part in an upcoming workshop on the same issue. Despite the joint initiatives launched by her Office, he noted that the number of cases of grave violations against children had not diminished and asked what the biggest challenges were in that regard. Given the high levels of cross-border recruitment and the subsequent challenges posed in terms of repatriation and reintegration, he also wondered what role regional and subregional organizations could play to ensure an effective response in the best interest of children.

23. **Mr. Mohd Nasir** (Malaysia), expressing concern about the plight of children in the conflict areas in the State of Palestine, said that the Special Representative should dedicate more attention to the situation faced by children there and reflect her findings in future reports for the benefit of Member States.

24. **Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the report of the Special Representative failed to address the rights of children in conflict zones in a professional and objective manner, and that double standards and pressure exerted by certain influential Member States had undermined the report's credibility. For example, her report referred to the recruitment of children from other States to terrorist organizations, but no mention was made of who had recruited them, who had paid for their travel or who had brainwashed them via the Internet. It also failed to indicate why the home

countries of those child fighters had rejected Syrian requests for their repatriation.

25. Such reports were being used as a tool to put pressure on certain States and to target them politically. They ignored Syrian efforts to protect children and covered up the documented crimes against children living in occupied Arab territories as well as the crimes committed by the international coalition. More neutrality, professionalism and credibility were needed.

26. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that her country commended the efforts of the Special Representative and her team to implement the joint action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Sudanese Armed Forces, finalized in April 2018 following the adoption of three outstanding measures, which had resulted in the delisting of the Sudanese Armed Forces from the annexes to Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. The three measures in question had been the adoption of standard operating procedures on the release and hand-over of children associated with armed groups; the adoption of community-based complaint mechanisms to report child recruitment; and initiation of an awareness-raising campaign on grave violations against children. She commended the Special Representative both for her visit to the Sudan in February 2018 and for her advocacy efforts to establish a national prevention plan for the protection of children. Her delegation remained strongly committed to cooperating with the Special Representative and also welcomed the recent adoption of Security Council resolution 2427 (2018), which would further crystalize the protection of children in armed conflicts.

27. **Mr. Khashaan** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation condemned the failure in the report of the Special Representative to mention the violations committed by armed rebel groups against children in Yemen, which included killing them, using them as human shields and recruiting them into militias. The children of Yemen endured great humanitarian suffering as a result. The international community must lend a helping hand, but first it must accurately identify the reasons for that suffering. The armed rebel groups were not content merely to control Yemen, but rather, aimed to destroy it.

28. His delegation was also astonished at the humanitarian catastrophe endured by the Rohingya people in Rakhine State, as described in the report detailing horrific violations against Rohingya children, sexual violence and the forced displacement of approximately one million people to Bangladesh. His delegation wished to inquire about the results of the plan of action that the Special Representative was pursuing with the parties to the conflict in Myanmar.

29. **Ms. Shaheen** (United Arab Emirates) said that her delegation aligned itself with the comments made by Saudi Arabia and welcomed the important advances made by the Special Representative in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict, achieved primarily through action plans and bilateral engagement with parties to conflict. Given that the recruitment of children by armed groups remained endemic, she asked what Member States should do to reintegrate child soldiers who came into their custody and what steps the Office of the Special Representative was taking to strengthen accountability mechanisms for armed groups that recruited and used children in violation of international humanitarian law.

30. **Ms. Swatz** (South Africa) said that although it was heartening to hear of those countries that had finalized commitments and action plans to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, it was disturbing to read of the number of children that continued to be abducted by armed groups and forcibly recruited to participate in armed conflict, serving either as combatants, servants or sex slaves. The impact of war on girls who had been exploited by armed groups was a matter of particular concern. It was therefore an imperative to address the root causes of conflict and contributing factors such as poverty, underdevelopment and inequality. Her delegation looked forward to the outcomes of the independent expert for the global study on situation of children deprived of liberty, which would provide quantitative research on the number of those children, as well as recommendations and best practices on how the best interests of children in conflict situations should be promoted and supported.

31. Unfortunately, children who had previously been forced into armed conflict were often subsequently recruited by unregulated private, military and security companies, thereby continuing their exposure to violence and conflict. Those companies would continue on that trajectory with impunity until the United Nations human rights system elaborated a legally binding instrument to hold those entities accountable for human rights abuses.

32. **Ms. Bellout** (Algeria) said that the increase in the number of grave violations against children over the past year was alarming. Preventing parties to conflict from recruiting child soldiers could make a major contribution to sustainable and durable peace around the world. Moreover, conflict prevention and resolution were imperative steps for the protection of children. Concrete measures to protect children in armed conflict

should include joint efforts to fight terrorism in all its forms, effective and long-term conflict prevention and resolution strategies through diplomatic channels, an acknowledgement of the vital role played by regional organizations and the promotion of national efforts. Her country supported the active role of the Special Representative in the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers".

33. **Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) said that his delegation affirmed its full commitment to the Safe Schools Declaration and to all the treaties ratified by Yemen pertaining to the rights of children. His Government called on the Office of the Special Representative to renew the action plan signed by Yemen in 2014 to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces. Yemen also reiterated its invitation to the Special Representative to visit the country so that she could investigate crimes committed by militias against Yemeni children, as it was important to name and shame those responsible for causing suffering as opposed to merely citing statistics. Furthermore, her Office should update existing monitoring mechanisms and should not rely on sources controlled by militia forces.

34. **Mr. El Mkhant** (Morocco) asked whether the Special Representative could elaborate on how her Office was working in coordination with other United Nations bodies, whether any improvements had been made in that regard and whether there was any overlapping of mandates. He would also appreciate more details about her dialogues with Member States on prevention and protection efforts.

35. **Ms. Oehri** (Liechtenstein) said that the report of the Special Representative indicated an increase in the number of verified cases for each of the six grave violations against children in 2017 compared with 2016 and asked for details on the underlying factors of that devastating trend and how it could be best addressed. Sexual violence affected both girls and boys. While male victims made up the majority of victims in certain contexts, such as child recruitment or detention settings, sexual violence against men and boys continued to be underreported owing to cultural taboos and the fear of being stigmatized. She asked how such violence could be better addressed and how more comprehensive solutions for all victims could be found, irrespective of their gender.

36. **Ms. Shlein** (Israel) said that it was strange to hear the Palestinian representative discuss the situation of Palestinian children without mentioning Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization that had violently seized control of Gaza in 2007 and was committed to the destruction of Israel. Hamas had fired tens of thousands of rockets into Israel, including several hundred rockets in August 2018, and children in southern Israel remained in constant threat of rocket attacks. She wondered why the oppressive and brutal rule of Hamas had not been mentioned in the report of the Special Representative and urged her to look into that issue as well.

37. **Ms. Elmarmuri** (Libya) said that the Special Representative had mentioned that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) recruited youths in Tripoli and smuggled them by sea to Syria. In the light of such practices, it was clear that ISIL had no regard for children or for Libya or any other State. Libya had been the target of terrorists who were trained abroad and who entered the country from all sides. Children of various nationalities had been brought into Libya by ISIL in that manner and had subsequently lost contact with their families. The Special Representative's efforts to protect children would not be successful as long as "hidden hands" continued to give cover to terrorists and to exploit children.

38. **Ms. Gamba** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that education was the most effective component of reintegration and rehabilitation efforts and, furthermore, an effective means of prevention. As her Office strived to allow children to express their ideas about their own plights, it planned to ask them for their opinions about mediation guidelines and reintegration and rehabilitation processes. The full potential of children's input had not yet been explored.

39. The monitoring and reporting mechanism was strong, and the recent increase in reports was attributable to efforts to ensure the presence of adequate staff on the ground. However, monitoring and verification activities were extremely difficult when access to conflict areas was denied, and therefore all States, insofar as they were able, should allow task forces to enter. The mechanism had also been weakened by a 2017 decision to reduce resources for child protection advisors on the ground, which had been driven by the concern of some Member States to avoid duplication of services. However, those concerns were not well-founded: child protection task forces on the ground reported to United Nations agencies that worked in synergy, obviating overlap. Any cuts to the budget for child protection staff would undermine the "soft" aspects of peacekeeping. The only way to improve the mechanism was through increased resources.

40. Although joint action plans were effective means of strengthening accountability, they ideally played a preventive role. A joint action plan was not merely an expression of intention but rather a checklist of concrete

actions to be undertaken by the parties. Checklist items included criminalization of the six grave violations, better screening processes for soldiers and the creation of birth registries, which would allow armed forces to ascertain the ages of their soldiers. Upon signing of a joint action plan, the signatories received training in how to identify children in order to avoid future incidents of child recruitment. Joint action plans also provided for awareness-raising campaigns and reporting hotlines.

41. The Office of the Special Representative planned to develop regional and subregional action plans to prevent violations that took place across national borders. In that context, the States of a given region would be encouraged to sign memorandums with standard operating procedures, such as which entity would take custody of child soldiers recruited in one country, used in a second and captured in a third. Currently, her Office was engaged with subregional organizations in developing prevention plans and was holding regional workshops for country task forces on monitoring and reporting in order to incorporate preventive measures into their activities. Her Office also offered technical guidance on mediation.

42. With respect to future projects, her Office was planning awareness-raising campaigns in every region on the six grave violations. It also planned to support and endorse similar awareness-raising campaigns undertaken by other agencies, such as non-governmental organizations, regional organizations and other bodies, and would offer assistance to any campaigns related to Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, 8 and 16.

43. She agreed with the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic that she should visit the country and encouraged its Government to issue a formal invitation. Her Office and the Syrian Government should be able to come to an agreement granting the country task force on monitoring and reporting access to all parts of the country.

44. **Ms. Santos Pais** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children), introducing her annual report (A/73/276), said that, nine years previously, in her first address to the Committee, she had shared three key criteria for assessing progress towards the goal of ending violence against children: the development of national plans; the enactment and enforcement of legislation; and the consolidation of data and research. Since then, the number of national plans had more than doubled and tangible progress had been made in the area of legislation. In Brazil, for example, mandatory reporting had been instituted for professionals working with children, and detailed legal guidance had been made available on protecting and preventing the revictimization of child victims and witnesses.

45. The sharing of images of the sexual abuse of children was a shocking phenomenon. Over the previous five years in the United Kingdom alone, such images had increased sevenfold. Globally, the figures were equally disturbing: in 2017, there had been a 35 per cent increase in reports processed. Eighty-six per cent of victims were girls and 55 per cent were below 10 years of age. In addition, more images of the severest forms of abuse had been posted, including rape and torture.

46. Turning her attention to the phenomena of bullying and cyberbullying, she said that the report of the Secretary-General on protecting children from bullying (A/73/265) documented numerous policy, legal and advocacy measures to address and prevent it. The report also acknowledged the importance of the awareness-raising campaigns that had been launched around the world.

47. Several key milestones in 2019, namely the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the review of Sustainable Development Goal 16 to take place at the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the first summit to review progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, would provide opportunities for Member States to share their positive experiences and their frank evaluations of persisting gaps in violence prevention.

48. **Mr. O'Brien** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union was committed to strengthening efforts to ensure that all children could grow up free from violence, neglect and exploitation., as reflected in its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

49. In the light of the Special Representative's assessment that violence went hand-in-hand with deprivation and cycles of vulnerability, he wished to know which investments in early childhood would be most effective in reducing risks of its serious and often irreversible long-term impact. Given her involvement in the eleventh European Union Forum on the Rights of the Child and in the United Nations task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, the Special Representative should elaborate on why it was so important to ensure that prevention and protection measures be guided by the views and experiences of children and provide some best practices in that regard.

50. **Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation reiterated its total rejection of violence

against children in any form. His delegation supported open dialogue and trust-building. However, due to politically-motivated attacks on Syrian efforts, his Government needed to be persuaded that such trust-building was possible. In recent years, Syria had worked together with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to protect children, but those endeavours had all been ignored and the Government had been demonized. Trust-building based on sincere dialogue was the key to enabling all parties to work together.

51. **Mr. Bastida Peydro** (Spain) said that his country was working on a preliminary draft law on comprehensive protection from violence against children that would contain a definition of violence in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child in areas such as physical and mental abuse, neglect, exploitation and sexual abuse, including new forms of violence such as harassment on social media. The draft law would develop specific protection measures for vulnerable minors, such as girls, victims of trafficking, minors with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

52. **Mr. Duarte Lopes** (Portugal) said that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda had significantly contributed towards consolidating efforts to counter violence against children. He wondered how to capitalize on positive developments for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and how to ensure that the upcoming thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was not merely symbolic.

53. As set out in the report of the Secretary General (A/73/265), bullying in sports was a reality that was not always recognized or addressed. To break the silence, it was necessary to collect reliable and disaggregated data and to consolidate research on that issue. Portugal had recently conducted research on the incidence and nature of bullying behaviours among male adolescent athletes and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Special Representative on that issue.

54. **Ms. Fréchin** (Switzerland) said that the report of the Secretary-General on protecting children from bullying encouraged a multidisciplinary and multi-participatory approach. She asked the Special Representative to give examples of good practices in that area. Given that the report also highlighted the role that children could play as agents of change in implementing policies that affected them, she also wondered how Member States could better support the participation of children who were defending their own rights.

55. **Mr. De la Mora Salcedo** (Mexico) wondered what specific measures Governments could adopt to address the impact of violence on early childhood development and what had been the greatest challenge faced by the Special Representative in her dialogue with Governments on school bullying, which was a priority for his Government.

56. **Ms. Gran** (Norway), welcoming the crucial strides made in placing the protection of children against violence at the heart of regional policy agendas, said that in Bhutan, for example, special attention was now given to the elimination of harmful practices and the importance of strengthening partnerships, including with religious leaders. As cooperation with regional organizations had been key to accelerating progress on the issue, information on how the annual cross-regional meetings of United Nations system organizations were supporting progress with regard to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goal target 16.2 would be appreciated.

57. **Mr. de Souza Monteiro** (Brazil) said that children in his country had helped to shape national policies and programmes in such areas as the empowerment of girls and the engagement of children with disabilities, indigenous children and children of African descent. While welcoming the Special Representative's support for the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and for the development of a global compact on refugees, which would be essential to the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, he asked what critical normative gaps needed to be addressed to achieve a world free of violence against children by 2030.

58. **Ms. Tasuja** (Estonia) asked how the momentum could be strengthened in the coming years to ensure that children had a greater voice in defending their right to freedom from violence.

59. **Ms. Klopčič** (Slovenia) said that her country had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure in May 2018 and, more recently, representatives of her Government had signed a declaration for the establishment, development, implementation and operation of a "Children's House" for child victims of sexual abuse. It would be helpful if the Special Representative could describe, on the basis of her experience and expertise, what more could be done to make the necessary quantum leap forward in strengthening the protection of children from violence.

60. **Ms. Andújar** (Dominican Republic) said that her Government, with support from UNICEF, was implementing a national road map on the prevention and

elimination of violence against children and adolescents, which had been developed with the guidance of the Special Representative and the full participation of civil society, including young people, thereby fostering synergies among stakeholders and ensuring that children, in particular the most vulnerable among them, would not be left behind. Her delegation would welcome the Special Representative's opinion on the importance of such processes in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean.

61. **Ms. Moreno** (Observer for the Council of Europe) said that the contribution of the Special Representative and her Office to the standard-setting work of the Council of Europe had been greatly appreciated, especially the input provided for guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment which had recently adopted by the Council's Committee of Ministers.

62. In order to develop effective prevention and protection strategies against violence in sport, its numerous dimensions must be fully understood. In 2018, the Council had launched the international campaign "Start to Talk", to stop child sexual abuse in sport. The Council was also providing public authorities and the sports movement with specific guidance on how to develop child safeguarding policies, codes of conduct and training for coaches, as well as resources for empowering children and their families. On 5 October 2018, the Council and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) had signed a memorandum of understanding in which the protection of children was prioritized, showing that the sports movement had started to recognize the extent of the problem and the urgency to act. The Council looked forward to working further with the Special Representative and to cooperating with sports federations, clubs and the Olympic movement to make sport a safe and inclusive experience for all children.

63. **Ms. Santos Pais** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children) said that she had been fortunate to be part of the team that had drafted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite the political polarization of that era and the differences in legal systems and political approaches, Member States had nevertheless been able to find unity when it came to children's rights. Currently, the world was similarly divided, but it should nevertheless be possible to unite and view children as "zones of peace" and hope. To that end, her Office was collaborating with agencies such as UNICEF, the International Labour Organization and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as with regional organizations, civil society, academia and children themselves, to develop a global thematic report that would document best practices that had emerged since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The report could not, however, include only good news, given the level of suffering experienced by children around the world. States should share their experiences regarding risks to children that had not been properly identified or addressed.

64. Early childhood development would continue to be a promising investment area. Government spending on health services, social workers, lawyers and courts to remedy the effects of violence could be reduced by investing in prevention. With respect to best practices for violence prevention, Chile and Peru were examples of countries that had prioritized child safety in their policy agendas and had shown that early childhood services focusing on nutrition, family support and social protection could be effective while costing very little. That approach freed up State resources to address more challenging cases, which had led not only to a reduction in violence but also to greater family cohesion and improved educational and health outcomes.

65. There were two main obstacles to combating bullying. The first was a lack of empathy. When asked, children often said that adults either turned a blind eye to bullying or minimized the problem, viewing it as a normal part of growing up. However, the adverse effects of bullying, such as suicide, were well-known. That empathy gap therefore needed to be overcome through investment in preventive measures such as training for teachers. The other major challenge in reducing bullying concerned the scarcity of data and research on the phenomenon. To address that lack, a global indicator listing the most efficient practices was under development.

66. All regions had developed plans to combat violence against children, most of which were in line with the 2030 Agenda. However, as violence was not confined within certain nations or regions but was rather a global phenomenon, it was important for all Member States to share lessons learned. The annual high-level cross-regional round table with all regional organizations was an excellent platform for the exchange of best practices. At a recent meeting in Bhutan, countries had shared their ideas regarding the role of religious leaders and plans to combat child marriage.

67. Migrant children faced a continuum of violence: it forced them to leave their countries in the first place, accompanied them on their journeys and confronted them at their destinations. In order for that continuum to

be disrupted, strong national child protection systems must communicate with each other across borders.

68. The law should recognize children's houses and allow for children's stories to be heard. The information gleaned could then be used to investigate incidents of violence, formulate the most effective treatments for children and prevent their revictimization. Legislation was needed to develop age assessment standards, as children were sometimes mistakenly thought to be adults and consequently not given the proper protection. Guardianship practices must also be better monitored.

69. Lastly, she welcomed the multiple national agendas on violence prevention and elimination developed with broad participation from State institutions, civil society, religious leaders and young people. However, costing plans, detailed implementation plans and follow-through were needed to bring those plans to fruition.

70. **Mr. Chaiban** (Director, Programme Division, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/73/272), the follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children (A/73/223) and the issue of child, early and forced marriage (A/73/257), said that all three reports showed that realizing children's rights was possible, but that innovative and effective approaches were needed.

71. The first key issue raised in the reports was realizing the right of all children to be heard as "agents of change" and increasing their meaningful participation through legislation, policies, services and programmes affecting their lives. The second priority area was removing barriers that compromised children's right to education without discrimination. The basic education programme established by Rwanda to guarantee 12 years of free primary and secondary education provided an example of progress in that area. The third issue involved protecting children on the move through dedicated resources, in line with the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the global compact on refugees. In the fourth area, ending all forms of violence against children, several countries had adopted comprehensive frameworks to end violence in schools. With regard to the fifth issue, putting an end to child, early and forced marriage, many countries had implemented relevant legislative reforms, national strategies and programmes. Examples included keeping girls in schools, conducting awareness-raising campaigns and strengthening mechanisms and services to protect affected girls and women.

72. Global trends such as digital technologies, protracted conflict, mass migration and climate change represented new threats to children's rights, but also new opportunities to realize them. The anniversary of the Convention and the upcoming high-level political forum on sustainable development provided platforms to raise awareness about children's rights and to track progress on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the light of those rights.

73. **Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation was grateful to UNICEF for its assistance, which in recent years had helped his country to address such challenges as terrorism and coercive measures, and the upcoming country visit of the UNICEF Executive Director was an important step towards enhancing joint work. Immediate action was needed to halt violations against children in refugee camps, including early and forced marriages, trafficking in organs, forced labour and recruitment into terrorist groups. Campaigns of hatred and racism that targeted refugee and migrants, including children, must also cease.

74. **Ms. Leon** (Costa Rica) said that it was important to use the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as an opportunity to assess the status of its implementation, identify the main challenges impeding greater progress and reflect on the realities facing future generations. She asked how the report on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children, an event that had led to significant contributions to the child-related Millennium Development Goals, could be used to report on holistic progress achieved in addressing the specific needs of childhood in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

75. **Mr. Chaiban** (Director, Programme Division, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the Executive Director was looking forward to visiting the Syrian Arab Republic and agreed that it was important to address issues of xenophobia against all children on the move, wherever they might be.

76. He welcomed the suggestions of Costa Rica regarding the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention and said that UNICEF looked forward to working with Member States, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General in that regard.

77. Lastly, he welcomed the notion of adapting the special session of the General Assembly on children to the Sustainable Development Goal era and to establishing an annual report tied to the high-level political forum that could help to track and document overall progress and serve as a complement to the

themes addressed annually in the report on the status of the Convention.

78. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the Group strongly believed that achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 was the bedrock for achieving all the Goals and remained committed to providing effective, inclusive and non-violent learning environments for all, with a particular focus on the needs of children. While significant progress had been made in Africa over the past two decades in terms of higher school attendance rates, lower child death rates, increased access to basic services and the decreasing gender gap in schools at all levels, numerous challenges still hindered the effective implementation of universal and compulsory primary education for all.

79. The African Union was accelerating efforts to implement its Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025, in line with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. At the Pan-African High-level Conference on Education, held in Nairobi in April 2018, African countries were called upon to integrate the commitments of the Continental Education Strategy and Goal 4 into their national education policies. The Group remained firmly committed to supporting the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the efforts of its Committee of Experts. The Assembly of the African Union remained committed to implementing Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children, which contained ten aspirations to be implemented in five phases and achieved by 2040, through national implementation plans aligned with the commitments and obligations of member States under Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals and other international treaties. In June 2018, building on the momentum gathered from the previous year, the African Union had commemorated the Day of the African Child under the theme "Leave no child behind for Africa's development", underscoring the need to ensure that children were placed at the heart of sustainable development programmes and policies of member States.

80. The Group was continuing its collective campaign to end harmful traditional practices, including through the African Common Position on the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa, the Model Law to end child marriage in Southern Africa and the African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage. At the twenty-ninth ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union in July 2017, member States had highlighted efforts and challenges with regard to the campaign, calling for sustained political commitment to promote legal and political reforms. An essential tool to enhance increased awareness and advocacy that had already been launched in 29 of the targeted 30 high-prevalence countries in Africa, the campaign continued to provide technical assistance to member States and other stakeholders to track reform processes and best practices. In partnership with United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the African Union had developed a compendium of child marriage laws across member States as a comprehensive and accessible reference for policymakers, researchers, advocates and other stakeholders. Several African States were implementing the African Partnership to End Violence against Children, using advocacy and cross-border learning to strengthen political action.

81. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union, at its seven session on ending child marriage in Africa held in August 2018, had underlined the need for member States to develop comprehensive multi-stakeholder approaches, including increased public awareness campaigns, to effectively end child marriage, and to bring on board key stakeholders. The Council had requested the African Union Commission to take the steps necessary to raise awareness and enhance campaigns on ending all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation of children, including child marriage.

82. The issue of child-headed households had come to light because of the HIV epidemic and the large number of orphaned children. Knowledge of how to prevent HIV was still very low in Africa, especially among girls, and adolescent pregnancy took an enormous toll on girls' health, education and income potential. With regard to displaced children, political will would be needed to end conflicts and allow the safe return of children. Efforts should focus on long-term solutions to mitigate the root causes of displacement, while providing children with support and ensuring family reunification.

83. **Mr. Shava** (Zimbabwe), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that all SADC member States had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had acceded to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, demonstrating their collective commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of the child. At the national level, SADC member States had enacted commensurate laws and administrative reforms to advance those rights. SADC also remained committed to the inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and supportive of Agenda 2063.

84. SADC was concerned about the challenges posed by child or early or forced marriages and the devastating

consequences of those practices for the educational, economic and social prospects of child brides. Regional initiatives to address such challenges included the adoption of a Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage by the SADC Parliamentary Forum in June 2016, in support of the African Union campaign on that subject. While significant progress had been made by some States in outlawing child marriages and ensuring that pregnant girls returned to school after delivery, gaps in implementation continued to exist. SADC was implementing various measures to help strengthen national and regional initiatives to close those gaps. Nevertheless, religious and cultural traditions remained key drivers of the practice and traditional leaders had a critical role to play in bringing it to an end.

85. Recognizing that education was a fundamental human right, a pathway towards poverty eradication and a strategic pillar for gender equality and women's empowerment, SADC member States continued to invest heavily in the education sector through various skills development programmes. The impact of health-related concerns, such as obstetric fistula and the devastating effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, could be reduced by access to basic social services, including an affordable education and primary health care. In response to that need, the region had developed the Regional Strategic Framework and Programme of Action and the SADC Minimum Package of Services for Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Youth.

86. Governments in the SADC region had been encouraged to foster family-oriented policies in order to protect children against all forms of exploitation and abuse. They had also adopted multisectoral responses to eliminate all forms of violence and provide practical assistance to survivors through strong synergistic partnerships. SADC welcomed any development assistance that could help to close gaps, support educational opportunities and ensure that all children in the region enjoyed full and unfettered human rights.

87. **Ms. Thompson** (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that, in the lead-up to the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, efforts must be focused on the fulfilment of the commitments made to children under the Sustainable Development Goals. While the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto enjoyed strong support and many investments and improvements had been made by Member States, including through the historic inclusion of a specific target in the 2030 Agenda to end all forms of violence against children, more remained to be done to protect all children from discrimination and harm.

88. Many countries were off-track on at least two thirds of the child-related Goal indicators for which data were available, and even more lacked sufficient data for useful assessment. Sustained and reliable data were an essential tool to assess progress, identify gaps in policy and implementation and apply targeted prescriptions and strategic interventions. With regard to the implementation of the CARICOM Regional Framework for Action for Children, data were also needed to highlight the importance of planning for critical segments of the population and to provide a point of reference for child-related goals and targets.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.